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[Tobacco Addiction Hits Below-the-Belt](#)

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Naval Hospital Bremerton's Tobacco Cessation Facilitator cites that a person can become emotionally and mentally dependent on tobacco, using it as a coping tool to defer dealing directly with the issue bringing

about the emotions

By Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs

Smoking is one of the leading causes of statistics, which very well might be one reason that those who smoke chose not to read any articles about their habit.

Is nicotine addiction really nothing more than an exploding cigar that some willingly smoke? Who does that?

How can such a product have such a pull on some?

“Nicotine is highly addictive. It’s up there in the big leagues with addictive substances like heroin, methamphetamines, cocaine and nicotine. Crazy, but it is,” said Patrick W. Graves, Naval Hospital Bremerton’s Tobacco Cessation Facilitator.

Graves has heard the justifications, reasons, and explanations as to why a person picked up the habit, and continued using.

“Most often it’s peer pressure. A circle of friends with several smokers or being raised in a family with parents that smoke makes a person six-times more likely to be a smoker than not. Second to that it’s an ‘escape.’ It’s a ‘break’ from the daily grind. It’s a break from kids if you’re a parent, and sometimes in the culture of the Navy, it’s one of the ‘only’ reasons a person can take a break from duties,” Graves said, adding that even though there are official Navy directives that explicitly define that ‘breaks will be equal between smokers and non-tobacco users alike and when a conflict arises to accommodate both, the rights of the non-smoker, should prevail.’

Graves cites that a person can become emotionally and mentally dependent on tobacco, using it as a coping tool to defer dealing directly with the issue bringing about the emotions.

“It’s ultimately defective, but it’s what people do,” said Graves.



Nicotine is highly addictive. It’s up there in the big leagues with addictive substances like heroin, methamphetamines, cocaine and nicotine

NHB’s Tobacco Cessation program – the longest running and most successful in the Navy – has been clinically run by Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program counselors since 1998 when it was recognized

that nicotine dependence was similar to alcohol or any other substance and it needed to be treated as such. Graves is one of the counselors whose main focus is to help others. He knows that there are those who might need help, but also might be resistant to change.

“We let people be people and make their own choices. Tobacco is legal and available, and as long as people are smoking in spaces designated for it, I have no objection. All people are free to make choices, but they are not exempt from the consequences of their choices. Sad, but true,” stated Graves, adding that when person starts using tobacco early – think as a teen and for some pre-teen years – it’s usually because of a rebelliousness stage of development. Then later it’s conforming to a group norm.

Like many addictive substances, there is a siren song with tobacco products that attracts new users, keeps older ones around and lures others back.

“There really nothing new, per se, it’s the same as the appeal. But regarding keeping older ones and bringing users back, it’s because of the addiction. Using has become the norm and it’s too hard to try to quit. For return users, it’s conveniently reverting back to the old coping mechanism to address an issue other than smoking,” explained Graves.

Along with possible peer pressure and family influence, another manipulative method used to sway a person to using a tobacco product comes from daily doses of subliminal advertising.

“Marketing plays quite a bit in the psychological aspect of using tobacco. It’s the attraction of the ‘forbidden fruit.’ Marketing is always playing on glamorization of tobacco as something it isn’t,” Graves said.



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According to Graves there is a demographic group at greater risk than another to the psychological aspects of tobacco usage.

“The younger someone starts using, the harder it is to quit later. A developing brain that gets accustomed to nicotine being ‘normal’ in its development really struggles when it finally comes to quitting,” stated Graves.

Tobacco users have been bombarded about associated health risks and the amount of money they spend on their habit. Appeals have been made to their common sense...yet most ploys have mainly been in vain.

Graves suggests hitting below the belt, literally, with an expressive message – think physical combined with psychological – on what extended tobacco use can do.

Based on an American Heart Association study from 2003, research has indicated that [smoking](#) may be a major [cause of erectile dysfunction](#). The study showed that tobacco usage – smoking or dipping – impacted a man's ability to get an erection.

It's common knowledge that nicotine use causes arteries to harden, can compress veins and capillaries, restricts the flow of blood and is a major contributing factor in heart disease. It's those same factors link with all tobacco products that also lessen penile blood flow and contribute significantly to erectile dysfunction in men.

"The erectile dysfunction issue is not exploited enough. Besides a few others contributing factors such as physical trauma effecting nervous system or brain function, cigarettes are the number one contributor to erectile dysfunction in otherwise healthy males. If enough guys heard that message, it'd change attitudes," commented Graves.



On average, smokers die 10 years earlier than nonsmokers.

Yet...tobacco is still a legal product for anyone over 18, except in Hawai'i where the legal age is 21.

"The fact that it's still legal and is directly attributable to over 450,000 deaths as a result of smoking, dipping or tobacco use in general is amazing. It should be strongly considered as a threat to public health, even if you're not a user due to second hand smoke, and considered for banning," mused Graves.

Naturally, we'll end this with a statistic – over one thousand people do stop smoking every day. That's because they've all taken their last breath.

Additionally, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cigarette smoking is

responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year in the United States, including an estimated 41,000 deaths resulting from secondhand smoke exposure. This is about one in five deaths annually, or 1,300 deaths every day.

On average, smokers die 10 years earlier than nonsmokers. Talking about hitting below the belt.

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